

Message Text

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TAGS: EGEN, PL

SUBJECT: SOME WAGES AND FARES RAISED BY POLISH RAILROADS

1. AFTER SEVERAL DAYS OF MOOD-SETTING PRESS ARTICLES DESCRIBING PROBLEMS IN RAIL TRANSPORT, SOME RAILROAD FARES AND WAGES WERE RAISED AUGUST 22. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE INCREASES, IN THE FORM OF A COMMUNIQUE FROM A JOINT SESSION OF THE GOVERNMENT PRESIDUM AND THE CENTRAL COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS, STATED THAT, IN VIEW OF THE EXCEPTIONAL IMPORTANCE OF RAIL TRANSPORT, THE SESSION HAD APPROVED A PROPOSAL OF THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION AND THE CHAIRMAN OF THE RAILWAY WORKERS UNION TO INTRODUCE A PAY INCREASE FOR BASIC RAILWAY SERVICE WORKERS. ALSO APPROVED WAS A RECOMMENDATION FROM THE SAME ORGANIZATIONS TO RAISE THE COST OF TICKETS ON FAST TRAINS BY 45 PERCENT, AND ON EXPRESS TRAINS BY 75 PERCENT, EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1. ONE BILLION ZLOTYS OF THE REVENUES OBTAINED FROM THESE PRICE INCREASES WILL BE SET ASIDE TO COVER THE COST OF THE HIGHER WAGES. NO MENTION HAS BEEN MADE OF THE DISPOSITION OF NEW REVENUES IN EXCESS OF THE AMOUNT SET ASIDE FOR WAGE INCREASES.

2. ACCORDING TO A PRESS COMMENTARY ACCOMPANYING THE NEW WAGE AND PRICE ANNOUNCEMENTS, RELATIVELY FEW POLISH

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TRAVELLERS WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE PRICE CHANGES. OF

8,000 PASSENGER TRAINS OPERATING ON THE POLISH RAIL SYSTEM, 120, SAYS THE COMMENTARY, ARE FAST TRAINS, 11 ARE EXPRESS. THE PRESS STATES THAT ONLY 2.5 PERCENT OF ALL TRAVELLERS UTILIZE THESE TRAINS.

3. COMMENT: DESPITE THE FACT THAT RELATIVELY FEW POLES MAY BE AFFECTED BY THE LATEST PRICE HIKES, THEY ADD TO THE GENERAL FEELING OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FUTURE GOVERNMENT PRICE POLICIES. FEW WOULD QUESTION THAT RAIL TRANSPORT HAS BEEN A PERSISTENT PROBLEM FOR THE POLISH ECONOMY, BUT THE DIFFICULTY APPEARS TO BE ROOTED IN A LONG HISTORY OF UNDER-INVESTMENT, WHICH INCREASE WAGES FOR RAILROAD WORKERS CAN SCARCELY REMEDY. IN COMMENTING ON THE NEW WAGE INCREASES THE PRESS NOTES THAT THE RAILWAY SYSTEM'S LABOR FORCE OF 350,000 IS SHORT 5,000 WORKERS. ACKNOWLEDGING THAT THIS IS NOT A LARGE NUMBER, THE COMMENTARY HASTENS TO ADD THAT LABOR SHORTAGES ARE MOST SERIOUS IN THE "BASIC" CATEGORIES, PRESUMABLY REFERRING TO LABORERS. THE WAGE INCREASES APPEAR TO BE INTENDED PRIMARILY FOR THESE EMPLOYEES.
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